THE SOLDIER BOOKS

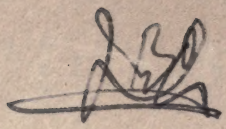
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BY

ONE OF THE JOCKS



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ODD SHOTS

BY

ONE OF THE JOCKS

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO
MCMXVI

A number of these sketches have appeared before, —several in the *Manchester Guardian* and in the *Glasgow Evening News*, and one in each of the *Glasgow Herald*, the *Sheffield Telegraph*, and the *Morning Post*. To the editors of these papers, the author's best thanks are due for permission to reprint them. He is also much indebted to Mr. Chas. L. Vicary for the drawing on the cover, and to another friend for help in preparing the book for publication.

France,
April, 1916.


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TO
THAT PRINCE OF LETTER-WRITERS
H. J. W. H.

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I

MATTERS OF OPINION

WHAT does he think of the war?—"he" being that extraordinary mortal, the ordinary fighting-man. Much has been printed on the subject, much that is interesting and vivid and splendid, much that is wholly misleading. Of the views held by certain branches of the service, the present writer knows nothing at all. He does not know what the R.A.M.C. or the Royal Flying Corps think of the war; he has never interviewed those haughty gentlemen who drive motor-lorries, or taken notes of the talk in Base circles. But for over a year he has been in constant contact with the man in the firing-line, marched with him, lived with him, fought with him, most of all worked with him, and what does *he* think of it all?

Why some men enlisted will always remain a mystery: they themselves do not know. But for the most, the greatest recruiting agent was not a primitive desire for excitement, nor a parrot-cry like "Your King and Country need you" (with frenzied emphasis on the "You"), nor any of those other ingenious advertisements which have amazed, and rather shocked, our Allies; it was not patriotism, as that word is usually interpreted; it was not a collective virtue at all, but that simple and old-fashioned feeling—*amour propre*. Once the war had started, and the country (as one frank recruit put it) was "in a bloody mess," it did not matter very much where we were fighting, or whom, or why. The more comfortable a decent and peaceable British youth was at home, the more uncomfortable he became at the thought that the other fellow was taking all the risks. So he rolled up in hundreds of thousands to the recruiting offices, with nothing more definite in his mind than that he was going "to do his bit." It is this same impulse

that provides the finest work during a "show." When his trench is being heavily shelled, a man may divide his time between abusing the Kaiser, and telling himself what a fool he was ever to leave home; but he sits tight because his neighbours are sitting tight. When ordered to advance under the fire of machine guns and other devilish inventions, he keeps on the move because the rest of his platoon are on the move too. An English battalion may do well because the "Jocks" are on their flanks, or *vice versa*; but as the size of the formation increases, the strength of this individual driving-power becomes weakened and fickle. After a scrap a man's predominant feeling is that he is lucky to be alive.

But actual fighting is only a small part of war, even in the firing-line. Most of the time the infantry soldier is a navvy—with the chance of being killed. During his four or six days in the trenches, he may have many things to complain about, but being idle is not one of them. The

amount of hard labour required in winter to keep trenches passable, let alone habitable, is beyond the comprehension of anyone who has not actually occupied them. And when a unit is relieved, the corresponding period in billets, after the first day, is simply a repetition of fatigues, sometimes thinly disguised as "working-parties." The physical discomfort of the life is tremendous, but the ordinary soldier's good spirits in the worst circumstances is genuinely amazing. If a man gets wet in the trenches he generally has to remain wet till he is relieved; but let him discover a potato-pit in some ruined farm, give him a tin of bully-beef, and he will make himself a meal with all the zest of a schoolboy playing at Red Indians. Providence did the German Emperor a bad turn when he endowed the British soldier with a sense of humour. "Laughing at trouble" is now a firmly established convention. A working-party may set out grumpily at dusk on a cold, blustery night; when it returns about dawn, tired and soaked to

the skin, it will probably be whistling or singing. This is partly bravado, no doubt, but the habit of mocking at Fate is a valuable asset none the less. "Jock" hates fatigues like poison, but he does them. He hates puddling about in wet communication-trenches, but he tells his neighbours it reminds him of Rothesay; nobody believes him, but every one laughs—and the work does not suffer. If he falls into a sump-hole with a bundle of candles, he refuses to be pulled out till he has retrieved the candles. Start him mining—where the whole question is whether you will blow up the Germans or be blown up by them, and at the end of the day all he will tell you is that at home a Government Inspector could have charged him with about thirty-five different infringements of mining bye-laws. When he gets into trouble, and makes an unwilling appearance before the C.O., he hates being lectured, but will take his "10 days F.P., No. 2" without grousing. He may even write home to Dear Flo next morning, and assure her he is still "in the pink."

His chief topic of conversation is the same as it was in the piping times of peace —football. For want of anything more up-to-date, old battles between the Rangers and Celtic are recalled in detail; and a debate on the relative merits of Jimmy Quinn and Bobby Walker will arouse more feeling than the Germans have ever been able to do. His attitude to the war is one of singular aloofness. The events on his own little sector of the front interest him for personal reasons; of what is happening elsewhere he knows little, and that little is always wrong; in any case, he does not worry about it. Though there are great differences of opinion on the subject, the writer is convinced that if it were suddenly announced that peace had been signed, about one man in every hundred would ask what the conditions were, the other ninety-nine would just throw up their hats and prepare for going home.

Nothing will be quite the same afterwards. But in spite of everything he has

gone through, and will go through before the end comes, whether he is satisfied that he has done his bit or not, in his heart of hearts "Jock" knows he would have been sorry if he had stayed at home.

II

KAISER WILLIE'S PRAYER

Oh Thou, wha in the heavens dost dwell,
Wha, jist because it pleased Thysel'
Hast made the German nation swell
Wi' pride and glory,
An' no' for a' the guid or ill
They've done afore Thee!

If twa-three jealous buddies seek
To prove that I am never meek,
Ye're no' to listen when they speak,
Ye ken I'm humble.
At times the best o' us are weak,
So let them grumble.

But Lord! it's hard to understand
The reason folk in every land
Should think each chosen German band
Will bring them evil;

Their answers to the least command
Are maist unceevil.

Lord, help my boats that lie sae neat
In what I thocht a safe retreat,
For mind, I'll blame Ye if I'm beat ;
Remember a'e thing—
Thae deevils in the British fleet
Are feart o' naething.

Confound the French and Belgians too,
Their fau'ts are neither sma' nor few ;
The fearsome Russian hordes subdue
Wi' castigation ;
And damn that double-dealing crew,
The British nation.

III

A SUBALTERN'S DAY

SCENE.—Anywhere in Britain.

5.30 A.M.—Dream that I am at St. Andrews, and have just gone round the old course in 71.

5.31 A.M.—Realise with a jerk that I am orderly officer of the day. Dress hurriedly. Phew! It *is* cold.

6.0 A.M.—Reveille. Point out to one bugler that he can't sound a call and yawn at the same time. No reports, thank goodness! Inspect and dismiss picquet.

6.15 A.M.—Feel better now. Rather pity the lazy beggars who are missing the fine sunrise and the clear bracing morning air.

8.30 to 9.30 A.M.—On trek with company to training ground. (*Memo.*—"Tipperary"

is a fine marching song, but after hearing it for the 950th time one gets dulled to its beauties.)

9.30 to 9.45 A.M.—Muscle and bayonet exercises.

9.45 to 11.30 A.M.—"Develop" an attack on a position two miles away. (*Query.*—Why is ground which looks so innocent on a map invariably a net-work of ploughed fields and prickly hedges ?)

11.30 to 12.0.—Test a squad in judging distances.

12.0 to 1.15 P.M.—Outposts.

1.15 to 1.30 P.M.—Lunch. (Two sandwiches eaten *al fresco,* supplemented by a chocolate ration kept for each of his officers by the ubiquitous colour-sergeant.)

1.30 P.M.—Leave company to the tender mercies of its captain, and walk three miles to a range.

2.30 to 3.30 P.M.—Musketry.

4.0 P.M.—Attend at orderly-room. The C.O. does *not* want to see me. Thank goodness again !

4.30 to 5.0 P.M.—Visit all the billets and

guards. Inform one billet sentry that he must not even smell of tobacco.

6.15 P.M.—Inspect new guards and picquets.

10.0 P.M.—Collect reports at "tattoo," and inform captain of the day that five men are out without passes.

10.15 P.M.—See all lights are out.

10.16 P.M.—See two lights in again.

10.17 P.M.—Warn offenders of pains and penalties.

10.18 P.M.—All lights out once more.

11.50 P.M.—Go round billet sentries and guards for the second and (I hope) last time. All present and correct. This *is* my lucky day!

MIDNIGHT—In bed. Confident that for one day at least the British Empire has got good value for 5s. 3d.

12.1 A.M.—Sound asleep.

IV

A CHURCH PARADE

THERE are church parades and church parades. Most of us who have worn the King's uniform for any length of time are familiar with the picturesque ceremonial at home, when we turn out in all the gorgeous finery of our gallant corps, when we march to our own splendid cathedral, and sit there under the admiring eyes of our sisters—and other people's. And after the service is over, we all know how relieved we are to get out of that padded scarlet doublet, which has grown so unaccountably tight under the arms since we last put it on.

Under active service conditions, however, our church parade unconsciously absorbs something of the severe business-like atmosphere. The equipment that has

been strapped on our shoulders for six days is laid aside; our rifles remain in their corner of the billet. Otherwise we "fall in," almost exactly as on a week-day. Almost, but not quite; for there is a subdued air in the ranks. The chaff and wordy by-play of the day before is absent. As we march off there is no sound save the tramp, tramp of heavy boots on the asphalted street.

The corrugated iron chapel which is lent to us for the service is as ugly as a shanty in the gold-fields; the little portable organ has grown asthmatical through long exposure to wind and rain at "open-airs"; the pulpit is as simple and utilitarian as a school-master's desk. Yet as line after line of khaki-clad men file into the building, they form a congregation that might inspire the dullest preacher; and our "padre" is anything but dull. He is a real live man, who understands (as far as such a feat is possible) that bundle of contradictory traits, the British soldier. So, our sermon is neither high-

flown oratory nor the primitive shaking of miserable sinners over hell-fire, but a simple talk from man to man on the peculiar difficulties and temptations of our present environment—plain, out-spoken words to plain, out-spoken men.

If here and there eyes grow sleepy and heads nod, who shall blame? Let the censorious first try a spell of early hours and long marches, and exchange his spring-mattress for a share of the hard, billet-floor. At any rate, the "padre" knows his men, and thinks gently of the slumberers. As he glances from row to row the intent, youthful eyes that meet his gaze drive pessimism from the heart.

The hymns, which in an open-air service are mostly band, here rise in a volume of sound which, though it might not please an elegant Mus. Bac., fills the little organist with great satisfaction. At the end of the service he learns for the first time that manly voices can make "God save the King" positively inspiring.

Then, with a rattle of bayonet scab-

bards against the side of the benches the congregation makes its way into the street again, and marches off as it came.

As it came? Not quite; for "some seed fell into good ground."

V

FATIGUES

SOMETIMES they are elevated to the rank of Working Parties, but like the Little Friends of the Prussians, they are always with us. Whenever a regiment lands in France (and no doubt it is the same in Salonika or Mesopotamia) there are calls for fatigue parties. As a battalion progresses towards the firing line its journey is punctuated by fatigues. These, however, are casual jobs, such as digging latrines or filling them in again. Only when a unit actually gets to the front is the full meaning of fatigues realised. Digging parties, wiring parties, water parties, parties to make sump-holes or repair parapets are all in the day's (or night's) work.

"Send two men per section to bring up rations" is a regular order that brings joy neither to the N.C.O. who gets it nor to the luckless individuals on whom he pounces. One has only to carry a heavy biscuit box half a mile to discover that none of its twelve edges will rest comfortably on one's collar-bone; and the bright metal appears to make an undesirably conspicuous target for some German sniper. Once, when we were new to the game and very green, one of our ration parties was overtaken by two friendly veterans, who offered to lend a hand. Agreeably surprised, our fellows handed over a box (contents: two jars of rum). The kind-hearted strangers must have lost their way, for they have not caught up on us yet. Meantime it is unsafe to mention the incident in the hearing of D company.

But to know fatigues in all their glory one has to fall into the clutches of the R.E., with whom they are a kind of mania. There is a legend that when a C.R.E.

dies, the first thing he does " on the other side " is to ask for a working party. The worst of it is, that just because the Jocks have a reputation for being good workers, their services are in special demand. Each fatigue that the R.E.'s set us, has its own particular effect on the men's spirits. Strange to say, parties erecting barbed-wire entanglements, while very alert, are almost invariably cheerful; the only plausible reason for this is that there is some satisfaction in putting trouble in the Huns' way. Sandbag filling is a task that appears to develop a kind of sardonic humour. After toiling for hours, filling, tying, and beating the bags into position, one man was heard to remark:

" Jock! we're gaun to be kept on here after the war."

" Eh! what for? "

" To empty the sandbags."

Trench digging is admittedly hard work, but it is not always the brawniest fellow who shows up best. Usually men work in batches of four, and on one occasion,

when a "traverse" had been completed very quickly, it was found that the diggers were not navvies or other horny-handed sons of toil, but a tailor, a footman and two clerks. Their attitude to fatigues is an excellent testimonial to the good discipline of the Jocks—and to their common sense. Before the war most of them were typical British workmen, probably trade unionists, possibly addicted to socialism, certainly accustomed to keeping a gaffer in his right place, and looking on employers with suspicion at all times. Yet the average soldier works, if not with enthusiasm, generally with a purposeful vigour that knows nothing of the "ca' canny" principle; and when occasion demands it, he will carry on till he drops from sheer exhaustion. But whenever it is possible, each party is given a set task—so many yards of trench to be dug, or a certain quantity of material to be carried. As soon as that task is completed the party is allowed to march "home." But to make this "piece-work" system suc-

cessful, the bargain must be definitely stated and kept to the letter. Otherwise one is simply asking for trouble.

Of the making of dug-outs there is no end: each has a short and chequered career from the time it is excavated till rain or a shell causes a sudden collapse. Though we are a versatile crowd, architects are scarce in our ranks, and at first many a weird *contretemps* occurred. A gang has been known to build four sandbag walls and begin the roof before noticing that the door had been entirely forgotten. By painful experience we have found that attempting to make large dug-outs is a mistake. Usually the desire to erect a trench "palace" was checked by the scanty supply of materials, though we sometimes fell heir to a ruined farm (unofficially), and put the doors and windows to unorthodox uses. But a six-feet sheet of corrugated iron will not stretch to oblige the ambitious man who has started a dug-out seven feet wide, and after being dug out of a dug-out once or twice one

comes to the conclusion that safety is, on the whole, better than comfort. For all that, in spite of its pitfalls, dug-out building is a pleasant diversion, bringing back for some of us the juvenile joy we found in planning and constructing our first rabbit-hutch.

There is never any difficulty about raising a working party if we are invited to construct something. It is a pleasure to make even trench-boards. Not only do the men take a delight in sawing and hammering, but when the job is finished they can generally count on being allowed to carry away a liberal gleaning of chips and odd bits of firewood—a handsome perquisite in a country where fuel is none too plentiful, and where the natives keep an eagle eye on every tree and hedge. One of our working parties was sent to the R.E. to tackle the cleaning of a deep well. The men were picked at random, and were not asked if they had any conscientious objections to swinging at the end of a rope 150 feet long. But they enjoyed themselves, and at the end of the

first day they offered to finish the whole job. They were given a free hand, so they divided themselves into two squads and started systematically. One morning the C.R.E. came round. The great man was so delighted with the keenness of the men that he promised a bonus of twenty francs to the gang that brought most rubbish out of the well in 24 hours. Next day he paid another visit, and found the two heaps of debris so much of a size that, like a good sportsman, he handed twenty francs to *each* party.

Unpleasant fatigues, such as scavenging, are kept for the gentlemen who, by reason of various indiscretions, may be doing field punishment—popularly known as F.P. But if the supply of culprits runs out, the deficiency has to be made up by people whose conduct may have been quite blameless. One such man was heard to remark to his neighbour; "What did *you* do in the great war, daddy?" Then he supplied his own answer: "I swept the streets of Acheux, laddie!"

To become thoroughly unpopular (for the time being, at least) one has only to announce during a "rest" that D Company will supply a party of 1 subaltern and 50 men at 8 p.m. with 40 shovels and 12 pairs of gum-boots (*i.e.*, rubber boots that reach to the knee). The selection of 50 men out of the 150 available is only the beginning of the trouble. When 8 o'clock comes it is certain to be raining, and the temper of the party is decidedly grumpy. Three men, who have been warned for duty, simultaneously express their regret that owing to sudden illness they are unable to accept the pressing invitation. Substitutes are found, and suitable punishment is promised to the sick men should the medical officer not confirm their excuses in the morning.

We move off in the dark, and reach the rendezvous to find a Royal Engineer impatiently awaiting us. Perhaps he may know where we are to go, but it is more likely that he came out with a draft last week and has never been up to the trenches

before. He calls himself a guide, but that is only an R.E. pleasantry. Wooden posts, bundles of sandbags, and coils of barbed-wire have been dumped at this spot so that we may have the honour of carrying them. We are lucky to be able to dump them where they are required, after crossing nothing worse than a ditch and some muddy fields. Then our various tasks are pointed out. Some men begin digging a new trench, some fill sandbags, some start throwing earth against a parapet to make it bullet-proof. Twelve unfortunate brethren are "told off" to don the gum-boots, and begin cleaning a waterlogged and very muddy drain. Six of these gentlemen soon discover that none of the boots will fit them; the subaltern expresses the genial opinion that they've jolly well got to fit. Only the man who has been given two "lefts" escapes to a drier job. The work goes on quietly, almost sullenly, for an hour or so; after that, somehow, bad temper evaporates. One sandbag filler starts to whistle, and

soon the old jokes are being passed along. A little fellow struggling under three heavy posts exclaims once more that his name is Tamson, not Samson. Eleven o'clock arrives, and with it the relief party who are to continue the work. We willingly hand over shovels and boots (including the two " lefts ") and clear off. We march home singing some ridiculous ditty about " Kitty in the city," and lose no time in turning in. Five minutes after we have dropped into our heaps of straw, fatigues and the Germans are quite forgotten; instead we are dreaming, perhaps of home, more probably (like old Bill Gunn) of toasted cheese.

VI

MUD

It is said that our fight with the Kaiser
Is the wettest affray since the Flood ;
At least every day makes us wiser
In the infinite samples of mud.

We've mud on our knees and our faces,
We've mud on our ears and our hair,
We've mud on our tunics, and traces
On everything else that we wear.

We've mud in our sugar and coffee,
We've mud on our beef and our bread ;
We seem to be tramping through toffee,
We're mud from our toes to our head.

We've mud that is dreadfully sticky
(Its depth may be more than a foot) ;
We've mud that is chalky and bricky,
We've mud that is liquefied soot.

At times we have mud that's like treacle,
  At times it is thinner than soup,
At times many men by a squeak 'll
  Just fail to try "looping the loop."

No matter what else may befall us,
  No matter how smooth be our path,
When home the authorities call us,
  The first thing we'll need is a bath.

VII

MY PLATOON

No. 15 platoon is unique: every one says so. Other subalterns add "and a good job too," but that is mere jealousy. For one thing, my fellows are a very youthful lot. I am certain before mobilisation most of them haunted ice-cream shops, and finished their Saturday evenings with "fried chips" or a tuppenny fish supper. Probably after the war is over they will again begin to frequent the same saloons, but that only makes their present bearing all the more noteworthy. In a genial moment the C.O. once called them the "cheery half-hundred," and no compliment was ever more deserved. In fair weather or foul, in billets or in the trenches, they are a cheerful crowd.

Though they might not agree openly,

nevertheless it is true that most of them are really happier up in the firing-line than when they are back for their four-days so-called "rest." In the trenches coal-fatigues are unknown; so are other abominations like equipment inspections, with their awkward queries about missing kit. On the other hand, food is plentiful, and lastly, but not least, a tot of rum is issued every morning. Zealous temperance advocates though some of us are, we would not willingly abandon the rum ration now, and it serves one useful purpose that the medicos never thought of. In the trenches we have a playful custom of making every man "stand to" some time before dawn. Kind friend, have you ever tried to rouse thirty tired men about 5 a.m., to say nothing of getting them to throw aside their warm blankets and come out into the mud? Thank your stars if you haven't: and believe me, that it used to be no light task for a poor subaltern and his trusty platoon-sergeant. Now the thing is child's play! All one has to do

is to announce that rum will be issued five minutes before the legal "stand-to" begins, but only to men who are in position then.

After dawn has broken, and I am thinking of snatching a few hours' sleep, my platoon really gets busy. First of all a breakfast of tea and fried bacon has to be prepared, nominally on coke braziers, actually by a variety of methods, from hot ashes to a lamp made by sticking a piece of wick into a tin of vaseline. One beauty of life in the trenches is that every man is his own cook, and can make meal hours to suit himself (more or less). During the forenoon, therefore, it is usual to brew another cup of tea. About one o'clock a lunch of bully-beef may be fried, or an "M. and V." heated up. "M. and V.," I may explain, is a meat and vegetable ration in a sealed tin—¾ lb. of meat and a liberal amount of potatoes, carrots, etc. One tin per man is the daily issue, but there is a bright youth in my platoon (known as the "M. and V. King") who has been observed to consume five tins

in one day! In the afternoon more tea is made, to wash down bread and jam or cheese; and possibly another cup is called for during the night, before sentry duty or after coming off. It matters nothing that in addition to their usual spells on guard, the men may have been up half the night digging or carrying up wood and stores; the cooking goes on all day just the same.

Even the R.E. admit that my platoon can handle picks and shovels, or move heavy loads. To cross muddy fields and ditches burdened with planks and stakes is no easy task, so I have great sympathy with one little fellow who was heard murmuring almost to himself: "I wish I was a pownie (pony)!"

One of the duties thrust upon the humble subaltern is the censoring of his platoon's letters. It is a joy we all hate—not that we unearth family secrets—but just because of the weariness of wading through the same tale, retold fifty times. There are several recognised "openings," the most

popular being, "Just a few lines to let you know I am in the pink"—the "few lines" often extending to six or eight pages—and it is not uncommon to find a man recording that he is "in the pink," though he may have been on sick parade that morning! If the Germans drop a few shells within half a mile of us, twenty scribes are sure to report that we have had "a hell of a time," and the majority of the letters end with the hope that "this finds you well as it leaves me the same." Now and again a real jewel is found, as when one of my toughest characters wrote to ask that his rose trees might be attended to; but such gems are few.

The "cheery half-hundred" are really at their best when on their way back to billets. As soon as we are well away from the trenches, some one starts a song, and five miles do not exhaust the platoon's repertoire. Our tastes are broad, though our leanings are towards the sentimental. Only one ditty is barred. Yes, let me confess it—"Tipperary." The programme

is "changed nightly." On one march we may favour negro melodies, on the next the choice may be severely classical, but the last item on the list is always the same—the immortal words, "Are we downhearted?" chanted in perfect time to the tune of the hymn: "Oh, come all ye faithful." After the final "No! No!! No!!!" we march at attention, and as they swing through the billet gates I come once more to the conclusion that No. 15 platoon are a wonderful lot.

VIII

THE FRIENDLY NATIVES

No sarcasm is hidden in the title of this chapter. The people of France and Belgium have been, and are still, on friendly terms with the British Expeditionary Force. True, the early exuberance with which they welcomed us is not much in evidence now ; the strain of war does not permit much exuberance of any kind. It is not surprising that the Maire of a ramshackle village, whose most onerous duty, hitherto, has been the repairing of the local pump, should look glum when he is suddenly called upon to find accommodation for a thousand men. What does he know about billeting certificates, with their subtle distinctions between duplicate and triplicate ? And he can hardly be

expected to appreciate at once the novel luxuries of "control posts" at each end of his domain. Even the suave explanations of our interpreter do not quite reconcile the Maire to the restrictions placed on the movements of his people. Passes never used to be needed, but now he must certify that "André Blanchard, 49 ans," requires to go to the next town for provisions, and will return the same day. A ragged scrap of paper—probably torn from a child's school exercise-book—is solemnly signed and marked with a rubber stamp. By the time we have countersigned it and added *our* stamp, it has become quite a formidable document. There may be moments when Monsieur le Maire wonders if even the Germans would be a much greater nuisance to him.

But the new *régime* brings its compensations. Les Ecossais, who speak such an uncouth tongue and wear such an immoral dress, have the pleasing habit of paying for all they buy. The oldest inhabitant cannot remember when money

circulated so freely in the village. The *estaminets* have had to treble their imports of beer, and hardly a house is without a quaintly spelt notice chalked on the door or hanging in the window. If it isn't "VVashing for Soldats," it may be "Vin VVhite 70c." or "Postecards and Eggs ici." The w's are all double v's.

Not a soul in the village has ever studied economics at a university, or even taken a correspondence course of business training, but nevertheless the essentials of the operation of the law of supply and demand are grasped quickly enough. Articles which madame has had in her shop for years and come to look upon as bad stock are now produced—with the original prices carefully obliterated. Pseudo-lemonade, which she sold last week for 30 centimes a bottle has risen mysteriously to half a franc.

The greatest "character" in the village is a veteran of the 1870 war. He carries a stick, with which he delights to show us how he bayoneted the Boches, and if the notches on his stick are correct he

must have accounted for a great number. He says he is too old for a march now, but—he draws a skinny finger significantly across his throat.

We cannot help wondering, sometimes, if people at home would be as unconcerned as these friendly natives if the Germans were almost at their doors. Would our farmers plough round the Jack Johnson holes as calmly, or would they write indignant letters to the press? It is easy enough to get used to the distant rumble of big guns, but over 100 shells landed in our village the other afternoon, and still the civilians stay on. "C'est la guerre" seems to be quite sufficient explanation for everything. Probably all who have friends elsewhere have already gone, and so, while there is a roof over their heads, most of the people remain, guarding their household gods to the last.

Sometimes, as at Ypres in the spring, they have to be ordered to leave, and then the full tragedy of war may be seen. A long string of carts, wagons, barrows,

bicycles, anything and everything, indeed, that runs on wheels, came along, packed with a strange medley of articles. An old lady dressed in her Sunday clothes was perched precariously on the top of a bed, like a farmer's boy bringing in a load of hay. Someone else pushed a perambulator packed with crockery. One woman carried nothing but a clock. Behind them Ypres was blazing, and on each face was a set expression that said "This is the end." That we should be marching eastwards while they flocked in the opposite direction did give some of them confidence, but the prevailing feeling was despair.

Weeks later, when a battered remnant of us were sent back a few miles for a rest away from the hateful salient, we found every farm-house packed with refugees, and billeting was a problem that almost defied solution. We were not received with active hostility so much as a "dourness" that was even more difficult to overcome. The people did not mean to

be inhospitable. The truth was that war had already strained their resources to breaking point. When we spoke French they did not understand us; that in itself was not altogether surprising! But when our interpreter was no more successful we began to think that, though Flemish was the tongue of the fireside, the good lady was not so ignorant of the language of diplomacy as she pretended. However, there, as in many another case, a few francs went a long way in smoothing out difficulties, and in the end nobody could have been kinder. One night madame even volunteered to heat a brick for the feet of our quartermaster, who was shaking with ague. Indeed, our relations with the friendly natives may be summed up in two sentences: They weep and wring their hands when we come; when we depart they weep and wring ours.

IX

THE GRAND PIANO

THE mansion is a ruin now,
Its glory has departed ;
Beyond the Rhine, to please some Frau,
Its treasures have been carted ;
But even German bands to-day
Some pricks of conscience can know ;
They took the lesser things away,
But left the grand piano.

They took the curtains, beds and chairs,
They took the very tables ;
They stripped the carpets from the stairs,
They used the rooms as stables ;
But ere upon the vanished scamps
We place a righteous ban,—oh !
Remember, though they took the lamps,
They left the grand piano.

They took the shutters and the doors,
  They took (or smashed) the pictures ;
Beneath our tread, the rugless floors
  On loot re-echo strictures ;
But when the plates and statuettes
  Had filled the final van,—oh !
Just think with what sincere regrets
  They left the grand piano !

X

AN OFFICER'S MAN

BEFORE the war Bill was a surfaceman on the Midland Railway. After peace is signed, if he returns to the railway service at all, it will probably be as chef in some station hotel. At present he dubbins my boots, cleans my clothes, cooks my food, and looks after my welfare with a skill that rouses the envy of my brother-officers. Fellows who scoffed when I installed Bill in his position, now send their own "bât-men" to my dug-out to get hot water for tea or soup at most unearthly hours. They know that Bill's pile of sticks is always dry, and that his stock of fuel lasts like the widow's cruse.

But it is as a cook that William shines superlatively. My menus, with which he has a free hand, are of a length and variety

unequalled in the regiment. Eggs, potatoes, and even an occasional fowl find their way to my table (an empty biscuit box), when the fare of everyone else seems limited to the substantial but monotonous service rations. At one time my conscience was rather uneasy on the matter and I even suspected Bill of looting, but investigation proved that any aspersions on his honesty were groundless. Yet his success as a caterer continued to puzzle me until by chance I witnessed his manœuvre at a farm near which we were billeted. Bill's French is limited to " Oui," and that comprehensive negative " Na-poo " (a corruption of " Il n'y a plus ") But within ten minutes he had given chocolate to the children, whistled to the canary, patted the dog, and captured the heart of the stout lady of the house by carrying in two buckets of water for her : all with a smile that was child-like and bland.

Bill's views on the war are peculiar. His pet delusion is that we are always up against the Prussian Guards. He is also

strong on rumours; at least once a week I am assured on unimpeachable authority (generally the transport sergeant or the shoemaker) that our division is on the point of going back for a rest. Almost as regularly William comes with the news that "There's a move on." Sometimes we are bound for Salonika, sometimes our destination is that district known as "Plug Street"; one wild flight of imagination booked us for the Persian Gulf.

I suppose that before the war broke out Bill had long practice in cooking over a coke brazier, and that the trenches only gave him the chance to perfect himself in the art. Now, however, he is so bound up in the job that it really takes the first place in his thoughts. No amount of shelling disturbs him if the preparation of meals is not interrupted; but if our "morning hate" comes over just when the kettle is beginning to boil, Bill becomes really angry. Sometimes, I admit, his zeal as a cook outruns his discretion as a soldier. Once, when the mud near my dug-out was

particularly deep, I remember seeing Bill move his brazier to a cleaner spot, quite oblivious of the fact that he was leaving the shelter of the parapet at the same time. My warning shout and two German bullets arrived almost simultaneously. The fowl, which he had spitted on the point of a bayonet, dropped on to the roadway as my cook dived for shelter. Within a few minutes he was out again, and more by luck than good guidance my dinner was retrieved undamaged. Bill's only comment was, " They nearly had your chicken, sir."

As a rule William is not communicative about his past history, but in a confidential moment he told me why he enlisted : " I just wanted to give some of the corner-boys a red face." And doubtless the force of his example had its effect on recruiting in his own district. Of one thing I am sure ; all through the ups and downs of the campaign a worried company officer has found comfort in Bill's cheerful face, and in his equally cheerful morning greeting, " Breakfast ready, sir."

XI

THE ROAD

To us it is simply the Road; it has a name, but we never mention it. There are many other ways into the trenches, but none has left the same impression on our minds.

By the Road we made our first journey up to the firing-line months (or was it years ?) ago, some of us thinking to exhibit courage by whistling—and only showing ignorance; some of us going forward in a dull, mechanical way; some few of us conscious only of intense curiosity. By the Road at dusk each evening a queer procession wends its way forward; in rain or snow, in fine weather or in foul, strange figures move along. Some carry wood, some a box of biscuits or a jar of

rum, some stagger under a load of sand-bags. But whatever their burden, one by one the muffled men go forward and disappear into the gloom. When darkness has come down, and the ruined houses have taken on their uncanny forms, a returning tide begins: men tired in body and mind, wet, unshaven and dirty, clothed with heavy brown mud, and moving with the bent-kneed slouch of utter weariness.

The strange thing about the Road is its length. At one end is a ruined stone bridge, and a shaky wooden substitute; the other end fades into a shell-torn quag-mire. Measured on the map the whole distance is seven miles, and when we are fresh from our rest in billets we do not seriously dispute that estimate; but the return journey from the trenches at the end of our spell seems to be over one of those moving platforms which neutralises every forward effort. As we "plug" along over mile after mile of abominable pavé, no two cobble-stones appear to be on the same level. By daylight one marches

as if crossing stepping-stones ; in the dark, tired men stumble at every step over the unkindly way.

We have gone up and down the Road so often that every turn is familiar now. By bitter experience we have learned the position of huge holes made by Jack Johnsons, and the more treacherous pits dug by Little Willies. We know where we must skirt the left edge, and where it is necessary to wade through the mud on the right. We know, also, all too well, three small patches of ground, each with its own pathetic mounds. And never, when we pass up in the dusk, can we resist counting the always increasing row of crude, wooden crosses.

Yes, the Road knows the realities of war. Before long its surface may be repaired, and peaceful traffic cross the pavé once again. But for us it will always be a " via dolorosa " haunted by the ghosts of weary and wounded men.

XII

THE BALLAD OF A DUG-OUT

SINCE at " somewhere in France " we were
landed
In many a billet we've been,
Exceedingly strange, to be candid,
Are some of the things we have seen ;
Quite frankly we make the confession
That " Jack Johnsons " explode with a
din,
But for noise we've a clearer impression
Of the night that our " dug-out " fell
in.

We have flopped into water-logged trenches
When the Germans have lighted a flare,
We're acquainted with various stenches ;
Of fatigues we've done more than our
share.

Our commander, in words that were biting,
Has corrected each company's sin,
But nothing was half so exciting
As the night that our " dug-out " fell in.

Already (above) it's been stated
That our regiment's " somewhere in France,"
For several weeks it has waited
For the fateful command to advance.
We expect that in June—or December—
We shall march through the streets of Berlin,
But far more than that date we'll remember
The night that our " dug-out " fell in.

XIII

SAPS

AMONG all words with double meanings, none is more deceptive than saps. At first it brings up a vision of a bowl and a spoon, and a diet as unsatisfying as the clinical thermometer one has to suck night and morning. Doubtless the term has been defined in all its variations by every dictionary, while whole pages may be found devoted to the subject by Mrs. Beeton, in books on Forestry, and in the "Manual of Military Engineering." At the front however, though we are not all privileged to express the opinion so bluntly, there is general agreement with our Major that "saps are the very devil."

Like Jonah's gourd, they grow in the night. Morning by morning, through peri-

scopes and field-glasses, we scan the line of German trenches for signs of freshly turned earth. Sometimes a sap can be seen eating its way slowly towards us; sometimes we have only a suspicion that the beggars are up to something. Sometimes saps are used by a sniper to creep nearer us, sometimes to send up star shells or shelter a listening patrol. Sometimes they get so close that grenades, jam-pot bombs, or other unpleasant souvenirs may be thrown right into our trenches, and often the cutting is intended as a jumping-off place in an attack. There is no reason to believe that the Germans like our saps any better than we do theirs, but that is another story.

There are about twenty-three methods of making a sap uncomfortable; none of them perfect. One plan is to buttonhole a passing artillery officer and suggest that he might kindly drop a few shells into the sap-head. We are often comforted by seeing a dozen shells land along the narrow line of the sap with an accuracy

the Germans themselves cannot surpass. Another rather more subtle scheme is to lay a mine. This is the kind of job that forces even humble foot-sloggers to admire the haughty Royal Engineers! At other times, when, for instance, we are digging, carrying, or doing a thousand and one fatigues for them, we look at the R.E. with jealous eyes; but when they lay a mine we admit that they have no soft job, even if their billets are tucked safely away, miles behind the firing line.

Of all the thousands of saps the Germans have dug, one will always be known to D Company as "our" sap. It was begun directly opposite our part of the line, and we watched it grow, day after day, with almost fatherly interest. We even organised a sweepstake regarding the date on which it would pass the stump of a willow tree that grew in a ditch running at an angle to the cutting. After a time, however, the progress of the sap seemed to be suspended; at least, so

some of us said. Others insisted that new earth could still be seen at the head. D Company were almost equally divided on the questions, "Has sapping stopped? If so, why?" and to settle them the subalterns agreed (with the C.O.'s consent) to send forward a deputation to examine and report.

Signals had really no right to join in at all: his job is to see that our buzzers always buzz, and after any shelling, he has the privilege of crawling about on his stomach mending telephone wires. Apparently that does not provide him with enough excitement, and when we have any special event of our own he generally turns up and demands his rights as a subaltern of the company. At any rate, he and our own Pickwick pulled the two short straws, and set off on their tour of inspection just before one o'clock next morning, after we had warned the sentries not to shoot them by mistake. Our information regarding the expedition is obtained by subtracting Signals' story from

Pickwick's, and deducting 50 per cent. from the result.

The night was inky black, and their troubles were not long in beginning. To let our patrols get out and in, certain zigzag lanes lead through the wire entanglements, but the explorers must have struck the line a few yards too far north, with disastrous effect to their clothes and tempers. Pickwick, indeed, for a minute or two seemed to forget all about the Huns in his zeal to abuse our expert erector of barbed-wire. As soon as they were through the wire, however, the need for silence put a stop to further vituperation. Slowly and carefully they crept for fifty yards on their hands and knees; then a German flare landed near them and they thought the game was up. For ten minutes they lay absolutely still, and tried to look like vegetables; then they began to make for the sap-head once more, stopping to listen at almost every yard. During this part of the journey their chief difficulty was to keep in the

right direction. When one is creeping on all-fours, it is strange how different the "lie of the land" becomes. Folds in the ground which appear insignificant when viewed through a periscope assume the contour of small hills, and distances seem deceptively long. In silence they continued to wriggle on, then, suddenly, a dark shape loomed up just ahead; and as the two lay watching it they could have sworn that it moved. There was nothing to do but lie still, and wait, with revolvers loosened from their holsters. Five minutes passed, and as the shadow remained in the same position, the explorers ventured a few yards nearer for closer examination, to find that the source of their alarm was simply our old friend, the willow tree.

They were now nearing the end of their journey, and had to be more cautious than ever. No flares or shots had come from the sap for some days, but the Huns might easily be lying "doggo" there for some purpose of their own. Signals had drawn

the shortest straw, so the honour of being "first man in" was to be his. When they reached the mounds of thrown-up earth, both stopped to "get their wind." Then, with a whispered "I'm going on," Signals gripped his revolver in one hand and a grenade in the other. Two seconds later there was a great splash, and an angry voice disclosed the secret of the sap in five words: "D——, it's full of water."

XIV

WIRING

In days of peace, like every other citizen, I have often "wired," but the verb has a new significance now. No longer does it mean the compression into twelve words of a message that Aunt Jane has arrived safely, but that the key of her trunk has been left on the parlour mantelpiece.

"Wiring," as we understand the term at the front, is really a sport—almost the only one we are allowed. It is quite as interesting as golf, and not nearly so expensive. All that one needs is a few rolls of barbed wire and some posts; and these are supplied free by the War Office. A dark night is also to be desired, but is not always obtainable. After the war I should like to meet the man who first twisted barbs on wire. I shall have

great pleasure in telling him what I think of his misdirected energy. Meantime, I can only say that his invention has added a zest to life in the trenches.

The game is usually begun by the commanding officer remarking to the major that "We'd better have some more wire out in front." The major passes on this hint to one of his captains, who in turn whispers gently but firmly to the subaltern of No. 15 Platoon that any quantity of wire and posts will be at his disposal by midnight.

At midnight, accordingly, word is passed along the line of sentries that a working party is going out in front of their sections, and in a few minutes six muffled figures creep over the parapet of the trench. Half an hour is spent carrying forward the materials for the night's task, posts large and small, a pick, and coils of wire slung on their sticks; lastly a heavy wooden mallet and some sandbags to deaden the sound of the blows. Silently, and as accurately as it can be done in the dark, the distances are paced out, and

the stakes laid down just where they are to be driven in. Then the ground is broken at each place with the pick, and the real fun begins—hammering in the posts. In spite of sandbags and every other precaution, a certain amount of noise is unavoidable. All at once the night has become dreadfully still; even the distant rifle-fire has died down; and, of course, the moon comes out from behind the clouds. Poor old moon, how we abuse you at these times!

Dump! dump! dump! Slowly the post sinks into the ground. Dump! dump! dump! till the officer says, "That one'll do." So the work goes on. All the while we have two men listening and watching a few yards away. One post after another is fixed, and still the enemy shows no sign of having heard us. Then "Phizz!" a star-rocket rises from their trenches, lighting up all the ground between them and us. Promptly we drop flat, and are thankful for our dark background. "Phizz!" another rocket bursts, and

lands quite near us. Then a machine-gun starts "pa-pa-pa-pa-pap." But evidently we haven't been spotted, for the five rounds are far wide of us. For a few minutes we lie quite still; then, as nothing more happens, we go on with the wiring, leaving the completion of the post-driving till the next night.

Now, the one and only good point about the actual wiring operations is their comparative noiselessness. If anyone doubts me, let him try to draw a yard of barbed wire off the first roll he sees at his ironmonger's, and then picture what the job is like when carried out in the dark. Either the barbs stick together, or three rounds of wire spring off the coil simultaneously and wind themselves round one's body like a boa-constrictor. Yet, strange as it may appear, there is a certain amount of pleasure in "wiring." The prevailing feeling seems to be, "This should give the Huns something to think about." Hands are cut and clothes are torn, but nobody seems to mind.

A good night's work done, we creep back to our trench, and send along the message, "Working party in." Just before we drop behind the parapet we listen for a moment. Faintly across the fields from the enemy's trenches comes a sound we recognise, "Dump! dump! dump!" The beggars are at the same game as ourselves!

XV

MARCELLE

HER name is Marcelle; that is all I am certain of; but though I have never seen the young lady, somehow I feel sure her eyes are blue, and I think her "pig-tail" is tied with a piece of bright ribbon. More than that it is impossible to discover, because the tide of war has swept past Marcelle's home and frightened her away. The little schoolroom in which she sat is now filled with "les Ecossais"; rifles and military equipment are ranged round the walls; the floor has been cleared of the tiny desks to make room for tired and dirty Territorials. But when lesson-books were collected for the last time, and locked up, Marcelle's little exercise-book must have been overlooked. It has been lying

in a corner till I rescued it to-day from the hob-nails of our worthy colour-sergeant.

Judged by her description of "le chat" and "le cheval," Marcelle's knowledge of animals is not yet extensive. Her handwriting shows a tendency to leave the ruled lines, but the neat pages lead me to infer that she is a tidy little girl. Probably she wears a clean, blue-print pinafore, and I can almost see her keep her shoes dry by stepping carefully across the muddy playground, now the scene of those open-air cooking operations which are almost the most wonderful feature of the British Army. Even on the wettest of wet days a wood fire burns brightly, and round it are ranged six steaming fish-kettle-like vessels, known to every Tommy as "dixies." The savoury odour of stewing meat fills the air; inside the little schoolroom the occupants are getting ready their mess-tins, and impatiently asking the orderlies how much longer they must wait. On the wall just above the place where Marcelle used to sit, hangs a map of

France showing "les départements." What would the Germans say if they noticed that Alsace and Lorraine are included in type as bold, if not bolder, than Pas-de-Calais and the rest? Possibly they would burn down the building; but the question will never be answered.

Step by step, almost inch by inch, we are pushing eastwards. Doubtless, when we move on, others who follow behind us will be billeted in Marcelle's schoolroom, will draw their own rude pictures on the teacher's blackboard, will dry their soaked clothes, and make "billies" of tea round the charcoal stove.

But a day is coming soon when Marcelle will be able to come back to her own little desk, and puzzle her brain once more with the elusive "système métrique." She will search in vain for her lost dissertations on the cat and the horse, and will never know, innocent wee soul, how much her artless opinions brightened one drab day in the life of a passing soldier.

XVI

THE DIARY OF A "REST"

SUNDAY.—At last our rest has come. It was rumoured in January, and looked upon as a certainty in February. In March it became seriously overdue, and in April it seemed to be lost for ever when we found ourselves in the midst of the Ypres mêlée. Now, however, the orders have actually been issued, and we move back to-night. Where we are going we neither know nor care. All that matters is that we shall be out of the sound of the guns and have nothing to do but watch the hops growing.

MONDAY, 3 A.M.—Here we are, "back," tired after a long night march, but who worries? We have seen many a dawn during the last six months, but the beauties

of sunrise never appealed much to us before. Mine hostess at the local *estaminet* has come to her door to watch us pass (and probably to calculate how many extra barrels of beer she will require). After we get the men into their billets, she makes omelettes and coffee for us, without demur, at four o'clock in the morning. Note that, O ye stiffnecked British inn-keepers. And her bill for four breakfasts is two francs! We have struck it lucky! Here is a place without shell-holes or burnt houses, where bread is cheap, and even the hens continue to lay at pre-war rates. Now for a good rest. No more leaky dug-outs and orders to "stand-to-arms" in the middle of the night. Ough! I'm sleepy.

1 P.M.—Chit from the Adjutant: "Commanding Officer will inspect your platoon at two o'clock to-morrow." Oh Lord! Must hold a preliminary inspection of my own in the morning; meantime, warn all N.C.O.'s to see that the men clean themselves and their kits.

TUESDAY.—Begin the day in an angelic

frame of mind, but am soon grousing at everything and everybody. Half the platoon's hair needs cutting, and several villains are unshaved. Rifles are passably clean, but three men have no respirators; four others have lost (or eaten) their emergency rations. The culprits are told they might be shot; but I shall have to get round the quartermaster. One man has no puttees; says they have been "pinched," which is probable but not very helpful. Platoon also requires five field-dressings, ten mess-tins, one bayonet, three entrenching tools, and two great-coats. Indent for these articles under one comprehensive heading: "Lost in action," and hope for the best. Ammunition only five bandoliers short: *that* is easily made up.

3 P.M.—Inspection over, thank goodness! Old man didn't say much, which is a good sign.

3.5 P.M.—Another of these beastly chits from the orderly-room: "Render by return a note of any men who have only been

inoculated once, and when." Parade platoon again, and examine all pay-books, on which the medical officer marks dates of inoculations.

7.30 P.M.—Dinner quite spoiled by arrival of orders for to-morrow.

WEDNESDAY, 7 A.M.—Turn out platoon for half an hour at Swedish drill before breakfast. Platoon grumpy; so am I. Forenoon spent forming fours and doing other elementary barrack-square movements. "Men mustn't get slack," says the C.O. "Left-right, left-right; left, left, left . . ." *ad lib.*

AFTERNOON.—More of the same, plus a lecture on map-reading to the N.C.O.'s.

LATER.—Am informed that guard supplied by my platoon has omitted to turn out to a passing General. Interview corporal, who depones that the G.O.C. was disguised in a new soft cap devoid of gold braid. Lecture N.C.O. on "Compliments, and when to pay them."

LATER STILL.—Company-sergeant-major suggests that men would like a little pay;

haven't had anything for more than three weeks. Must arrange to draw money from the Field Cashier.

THURSDAY.—More physical drill in the morning. Then a route march from 9.30 a.m. till 1 p.m. "Must keep the men fit," says the C.O. Pay out 5 francs per man in the afternoon; an hour's job signing books and balancing up. *Estaminet* busy thereafter, and later there is a certain amount of "pay-night exuberance" in the billet, but only one man in guard-room. Might have been worse.

FRIDAY.—Much the same as Thursday. Farmer alleges men are taking his cherries. Can quite believe it. My French hardly equal to the strain of explanations. Send the interpreter to suggest that between Allies a few cherries should be neither here nor there. Entente preserved at the cost of 3 francs.

SATURDAY.—March the men nearly off the map for hot baths and clean shirts—both badly needed. In the meantime unfavourable report on the state of the

platoon's billet has been made by the Medical Officer, and is forwarded to me "for immediate attention." Inform platoon that in the Army cleanliness comes even before godliness, and postpone football match till the place is swept out, the old tins buried, and the rubbish burnt.

5 P.M.—Note from orderly-room: "Render by return, name of one man for leave." Saints! How can I select one man out of twenty equally deserving cases? Bright idea, put all the names into a hat and draw.

6 P.M.—Another note: "Render to this office . . ."

6.30 P.M.—Yet another: "Render to this office . . ."

7 P.M.—Orders for to-morrow. Thank goodness! We are going back to the firing-line, where we sometimes get a little peace.

XVII

LEAVE

I MEANT to have a royal time
When my long-looked-for furlough came ;
To rid my clothes of Flanders grime
Would be my first and foremost aim.
I meant to lie in shady nooks
From early morn to dewy eve,
I meant to read amusing books
When I went home on leave.

I meant to loaf ; I meant to fish,
My special friends I meant to see ;
I meant to gratify my wish—
For things like sausages for tea.
I meant to smoke the pipe of peace,
Tell tales that no one would believe ;
I'd dream of when the war would cease,
When I went home on leave.

" The best laid schemes of mice and men "—
These words I soon recalled to mind,
As soon as with a grudging pen
My four days' leave was really signed.
Thin is the line 'twixt joy and care,
And surely I have cause to grieve ;
Each day I filled my dentist's chair
When I went home on leave.

XVIII

ONE DAY

DAWN on May 8th, 1915, found the Jocks burrowed like rabbits into the western bank of the canal, just north of Ypres. We (that is to say, all that was left of us) had come back the previous evening from one of the reserve trenches in the salient. We had just gone through the first fortnight of the Second Battle of Ypres. We had seen nearly all there is to see in war. We had advanced across open ground against the German trenches ; the Germans, in their turn, had come out in droves and let us get some of our own back ; we had gone through two gas attacks—and these in the days when our only protection was a small, futile pad, which we damped and held between our teeth. But more trying

than anything else, we had been shelled, persistently and with uncanny accuracy, throughout the whole fourteen days. No matter where we moved, those terrible guns had followed us. They had shelled us in the front line, they had shelled us in the retrenchments. One night we moved back to what had been a quiet corner, and tucked ourselves away. Before the forenoon was over an aeroplane had spotted us, and the nerve-destroying "crump, crump, crump, crump" of a heavy battery had begun again. Our stretcher-bearers and our aid post were shelled; our water and ration parties ran the gauntlet of shrapnel every night. For a fortnight our staple diet had been bully-beef and biscuits, with tea in the evening or just before sunrise; during the day all cooking had to be prohibited because the slightest column of smoke inevitably provided a target for the enemy's artillery. We had learned to snatch a few minutes' sleep when and where we could. Some of us had washed, a few had managed to shave, but

for the most part we were a grimy and war-worn crowd.

But we were in good spirits that morning, because we expected to be sent back in a few hours for a rest—back quite three miles! We "drummed up" cheerfully, made tea, and opened the tin of sardines that had been kept in reserve so carefully. After breakfast we were stretching ourselves out in the sun, and searching our pouches once more, hoping rather than expecting, to find a few odd crumbs of tobacco, when we heard heavy gunning begin "half-right," away in front of W——. At first this did not disturb us; it seemed only another case of "getting a wind up" to which we had grown accustomed. As the bombardment not only continued, however, but increased in volume, we began to follow it with a new interest. Was Fate going to interfere once more with our often postponed relief? A brigade messenger soon brought the answer in the shape of an order: "Be ready to move to B——." That settled it. We were going back into

the salient. A patrol was sent forward at once to reconnoitre the ground. It had a lively time, for the German barrage of shrapnel had begun. By judicious use of cover, however, the explorers made progress, and marked down the best route. The first half-mile was dead ground and fairly safe; then came the risky crossing of a ridge, keeping close behind a hedge—which gave cover from view but nothing more. Further on was a stretch, half trench, half ditch—poor cover, but better than nothing. After that we would have to take our chance. No sooner had the patrol returned than "heavies" began to drop all round us. Whatever may be said against the waspish "whizz-bang," it is accurately described by its name, for it does not keep us long in suspense. "Heavies," on the other hand, are many seconds in the air; they rumble nearer and nearer, like an express train, and end as if the engine had gone off the rails. The Field Almanac gives the interesting information that "practically no cover

procurable in the field is of any use," and we were in for a demonstration of the truth of this statement. The first shells landed beyond us, and seemed to be trying to wreck a farm-house. Next they dropped short, then one or two thumped into the eastern side of our bank. It was just as if some devils were playing with us, like a cat with a mouse. A barrage of fire was dropping over the cross-roads a few hundred yards away, but in spite of this, a six-horsed artillery wagon dashed along periodically with ammunition. Every time it appeared we held our breath and watched, but somehow it got through each time. Our own troubles soon gave us enough to think about, and before noon we had paid costly tribute to the skill of the German gunners. Shortly after midday the fire got so hot that we were moved along the canal bank 400 yards nearer Ypres. Before we had settled down in our new ground, the orders to move forwards towards B—— arrived. In spite of its dangerous possibilities, this advance

in single file, first across the canal by a pontoon bridge, and then up the slope to the village, was made unnoticed by the Germans and without loss. The two leading companies crept along the hedge, and lay down in the ditch that has already been mentioned. The rest kept further down the slope in dead ground. As the conditions were extremely favourable for aerial observation, strict orders were issued to keep absolutely still. Two hours passed very, very slowly. Several times German aeroplanes came over ; twice they dropped signal-lights, and we waited with pardonable interest ; but till three o'clock nothing happened. Then four H.E.'s (high explosive shells) landed in the next field. And we asked ourselves, " Have we been spotted ? Or, are these mere chance shots ? " That problem has never been solved. Punctually every ten minutes, for an hour and a half, four shells came over ; never more, never less. Waiting for each fresh salvo was a torture worthy of Dante. But if the Germans had known we were

there, they would hardly have been content to give us such a moderate ration. Of the forty shells fired, one struck the turf bank in front of us, but did not burst! One made a direct hit into the ditch, killed five men outright, and wounded twelve more. The others pitted the ground on every side of us, but damaged nothing except our nerves. The long drawn-out afternoon passed at last. Our C.O. had been forward to confer with the brigadier, and returned shortly after six o'clock with the cheerful news that things seemed to be going well in front, and that if nothing unexpected happened, our services would not be wanted; in all probability we should get back over the canal at dusk. That, we reckoned, meant moving at 8.15, and we began to count the minutes. We had come away without overcoats or any extra clothing. As soon as the sun went down we began to feel cold, and abominably hungry. Among all the bitter moments of the war, none had tested us more severely than when, just after eight o'clock, the

adjutant appeared with the message that a fresh assault had been made on W——, and that we were to go forward immediately. We looked at one another in silence—as someone remarked afterwards, "fed up, to the back teeth."

But forward we had to go, through B—— to a defensive line that had been marked out, but along which the ground had hardly been broken. There we proceeded to "dig ourselves in," with that wonderful implement, the British entrenching-tool; whose father was a battle-axe, and whose mother was a garden-hoe. We were tired, we were cold, we were hungry, but by the Lord, we dug. At eleven o'clock we were almost out of sight.

Someone then discovered a case of bully-beef, and we hacked wedges out of the tins with our clasp-knives. "But what were these among so many?" Two out of our three patrols had returned and reported the ground clear immediately in front of us; before the last patrol came back we were ordered to move on. That

patrol was met, hours afterwards, by our M.O., who, good soul, was making a brave but ineffectual effort to get rations up to us. By that time we were several miles to the north-east, called up by the disturbing news that the Germans had got into W——. Our orders were to co-operate with an Irish regiment, and clear the village before dawn. "Some" orders! Obviously the first thing was to get into touch with the Irish. An officer and six men started off, their only directing point being a burning farm. The C.O.'s last words were more significant than reassuring: "Mind, no shooting; but fix your bayonets in case you run into anything." After crawling forward about 400 yards they heard a noise like men breaking through a hedge; then a voice. There was a tense moment while the officer decided whether the tongue was English or German. It was Irish! He never was so thankful for a single word in his life. In his enthusiasm he walked forward at once, and was nearly bayonetted for his

pains. However, he had established something definite to work on, and returned to the C.O. to report. Then he turned eastwards once more, followed by two companies, "to clear W—— before dawn."

Some day the full history of that night manœuvre may be written, but not yet. One fact may be disclosed. The area that had been almost unoccupied an hour before was now packed with troops, all on the same errand as ourselves. Where they all sprang from, Heaven and the Corps Headquarters alone know. And a daring scout came back with news that not a single German could be found in the whole of W——!

About five o'clock in the morning, an orderly arrived to say that the Jocks might move across the canal again. It was broad daylight by that time, and under ordinary circumstances the movement would have given us "cold feet." But not a man hesitated. It was the quickest relief on our record. Except for a few morsels of bully-beef we had eaten nothing for twenty-

four hours; we had twice been badly shelled; we had covered over 15 miles; our casualties had been heavy—and we had never fired a shot. What a day!

XIX

PIET

His full name is Jules Pietoiset, but we have never called him anything except Piet. When war broke out he was, I believe, doing useful work in the Bon Marché, Paris. But within twenty-four hours he had turned his back on ribbons and become " un soldat de 65ieme. régiment d'infanterie." Fortune of war, and the discovery that he had spent six years in a drapery establishment near Piccadilly, led to his being attached to us some months later for duty as interpreter.

At first we rather scoffed ; had we not two officers who were each certified to speak French like a native ? Piet would be useful when our mess-sergeant went foraging for eggs, and in his spare time

he might (if possible) explain the jests of "La Vie Parisienne" to young subalterns; but for the stern business of war we fancied we could manage nicely ourselves, thanks. Alas! we soon found that it was one thing to talk French to a polite shopkeeper anxious to do business, and quite another matter to make the slightest progress with, say, a farmer whose barns we wished to commandeer as billets. That was where Piet scored every time. For though the peasant, by assuming an expression of extreme woodenness, could always make quite passable French sound like Chinese, he was "up against it" as soon as Piet opened fire. France lost a good diplomat when our interpreter went into the drapery trade. He would dangle before Madame a glowing picture of the quantities of butter and eggs we were sure to buy, and tell Monsieur tales of our capacity for beer. Unfortunately, Monsieur had already had troops billeted on him. These, he alleged, used a barn door for fuel, and his daily collection of eggs had

mysteriously dropped from 20 to 6. Piet was not the least nonplussed. The previous regiment must have been les Anglais. Notre régiment (I liked that *notre*), he explained blandly, were quite different. In spite of their semi-barbarous dress, butter would not melt in the mouths of les Ecossais.

When, in course of time, we settled down in a village near the firing line Piet's chief occupation seemed to be gone. Once a day he brought a bunch of "laissez-passer" slips for signature; otherwise he seemed to be a gentleman of leisure. Only when he went off on leave did we discover how much Piet was doing in his quiet way to make life run smoothly. As soon as his back was turned all the householders in the place appeared simultaneously to develop grievances. Some white stones which we dug out of a rubbish heap to ornament the path to our headquarters suddenly became family heirlooms of fabulous value. A cowshed, which must have been built about the

time of Waterloo, collapsed one night, and the proprietor promptly presented a bill for 140 francs. A "dixie" on one of our travelling kitchens boiled over and set fire to some straw. The cook gave evidence that only 24 bundles were damaged; the owner of the straw was equally positive that the number should be 80. Immediately he returned, Piet settled the dispute on the lines of Solomon by splitting the difference. Indeed, it is in dealing with claims that Piet shows his ability. He is always conciliatory—perhaps his training behind a counter has made him so; and somehow he manages to give every claimant the impression that the very best is being done for him. If the claim is reasonable, that is really the case. Piet's method of dealing with extravagant claims is simple and effective. For example, take the following letter which was handed to us recently: "Dégât d'un pommier coupé et enlevé par les Anglais, d'une valeur de 25 francs." He accepted at once the owner's state-

ment that this apple-tree was the finest in his orchard; he did not dispute that so many baskets of fruit came from it each season; but he explained that if the claim for 25 francs were insisted on, it would have to go to the colonel, who would pass it to the general, from him to the British Government, and then to the French Government. Some time in the distant future, après la guerre, a hard-hearted official would come round and pay 5 francs—perhaps! Would it not be better to take 10 francs now? And knowing that 10 francs was full value, the owner of the tree settled on the spot like a sensible man.

But all claims cannot be dealt with like that. Once we were billeted at a house into which a shell had dropped shortly before our arrival. What had once been the drawing-room was filled with splinters of furniture, and in an appalling mess. During our first evening we lit a fire in the next room, and thought we were doing the old lady a good turn by burning up

some of the *debris*. To our dismay she seemed fearfully upset, and immediately brought us a pile of orthodox firewood. Piet was called in, and soon explained to us that the room was being kept (or is "salted" the correct word?) for the inspection of some claims commissioner. I wish I had been present when that official did arrive, but, unfortunately, we had moved on, and the result of his visit remains a mystery to us.

Only in one respect does Piet show up badly; he is no horseman. A horse is provided for him in our establishment, and once, in a reckless moment, Piet allowed himself to be hoisted into the saddle. What happened during the experiment has never been divulged, but the horse returned to the transport lines ten minutes before Piet, who is now more convinced than ever that a bicycle suits him best.

The only "breeze" that ever sprang up between the writer and Piet was due to my unseemly mirth at the sight of the

new collar badge issued some months ago to all interpreters. It did not strike him as at all funny that he and his very voluble colleagues should wear as their badge a sphinx's head.

If, when you are buying ribbons in Paris "après la guerre," you are served by a little man with sandy hair and a scar over his left eyebrow, I hope you will be very pleasant to him.

XX

THE FALSE ALARM

In hospital he was known as the "False Alarm" for reasons that will soon become obvious. In the regiment he was addressed as Mr. Walker by the C.O.; by his brother subalterns generally as Fatty. He was also O.C. No. 12 Platoon, but that does not concern us at present.

It had rained more or less steadily for three days, and the trenches were blocked every few yards with miniature landslides, and floored with mud of the consistency of treacle. On the fourth morning Walker went into his dug-out immediately after "stand-to" at dawn. He had been up all night looking after working-parties, putting up barbed-wire and mending a length of parapet that the Germans had

blown in the previous day. That, however, was nothing unusual. His clothes were wet, his feet were cold, and drips from the roof of his dug-out had formed a pool among the straw that served as a bed. But that was nothing unusual, either. He kicked off his muddy gum-boots, thrust his feet into dry sand-bags, spread his great-coat over his legs—and fell asleep. He was awakened two or three hours later by his bâtman, who laid a mug of tea beside him and vanished. But O.C. No. 12 platoon found that his appetite was gone, his throat was sore, he had a splitting headache, and a general feeling of fed-upness. He dozed off again, and the tea was still untasted when his company commander looked in about ten o'clock to discuss the draining of bays 49 and 50, which had been giving trouble. To his captain the subaltern admitted he was feeling "rotten," and the M.O. put in an appearance soon after. That worthy felt the junior's pulse, took his temperature, looked at his throat, and

said, "Um, yes! Come along with me, young fellow."

Almost before Walker knew what was happening he was hobbling down a communication trench, leaning on the doctor's arm. From his billet in Plug-street a motor ambulance whisked him away to a Casualty Clearing Station at the place known to the B.E.F. as Balloo. (It seems super-precaution to warn the British Tommy against eavesdroppers, for nothing could be more mystifying to a spy than the popular renderings of French place-names.)

During his journey Walker remained in rather a comatose state, but when the motor emptied him out at the *infectious* annexe of the hospital he sat up, and began to take notice. An R.A.M.C. man entered his name, rank and regiment in a book, and gave the show away by adding "Suspected Diphtheria" in the remarks column. After a swab of his throat had been taken, the patient was put to bed in a painfully clean room. Next morning

the M.O. brought him the gratifying news that his swab had proved "negative," and would he please get into some clothes as quickly as possible, as a motor would be at the door in twenty minutes to take him to the hospital train? The diagnosis was now Tonsilitis. Half an hour later the False Alarm was being hoisted into a Pullman carriage fitted up with beds. An orderly pulled off his boots and tucked blankets round him, a "sister" brought a hot-water bottle for his feet, and asked if he preferred his pillow higher—or lower. He had the level altered several times just for the sake of hearing her talk to him. Let it be remembered in extenuation that he had not heard an English girl's voice for more than five months. Ever since landing in the country that some subtle humorist has called Sunny France, the False Alarm had been conscious of little but rain and mud and general beastliness. He had almost forgotten what it was like to lie on a soft bed with warm blankets, and have every

want anticipated. The trenches which he had left scarcely twenty-four hours ago, now seemed a tremendous distance off.

The beds near him gradually filled up: one with a staff-officer who had brought away a piece of shrapnel in his thigh. Next to him was a subaltern who, by some stroke of ill luck, had let a German sniper put a bullet through both ankles. But, though it may not fit in with the views of lady novelists, it must be recorded that Walker was not brought face to face with any long-lost friend or deadly enemy. In any case he felt too comfortable and sleepy to care. In a dreamy way he remembers being lifted out of the train again: then he was put to bed once more in a Base hospital, and given one of those neat temperature charts, without which no patient can be considered complete.

At first the False Alarm wanted to do nothing except sleep, and like sensible people the doctors and sisters let him sleep. After two days he said he was tired of slops; his next meal included

the wing of a chicken and a glass of port! Aladdin and his lamp could have done no better. The line on Walker's chart began to move almost horizontally, and life became interesting. The fellow who occupied the other bed in his room was a Welshman, who had been caught by a machine-gun somewhere in front of Ypres; but after a brief and breezy competition in strong adjectives, with which to describe The Salient, war was taboo, and the pair fell to discussing Rugger. Apparently, before the war, Walker had spent most of his time attending International matches, and worshipping at the shrine of one Wattie Forrest, Full Back, of Hawick and Scotland. A long and sometimes acrimonious series of debates might ultimately have shed much light on the dark deeds of the Welsh forwards, had the M.O. not forbidden further mention of football owing to its injurious effect on his patients' temperatures.

Early every morning Walker was washed—in a week he saw more warm

water than during the previous five months; at times a gramophone (though its intentions were no doubt good) grated on his musical ear; or a titled and privileged patroness of the establishment came round the wards every day, and left gifts of cigarettes or sweets, as the health of the inmates permitted. But except for these ministrations, which were borne with soldierly fortitude, Walker's life was extremely pleasant.

Yet somewhere in his system the virus of restlessness was working. His memories of the firing-line and all it meant were too fresh to let him say honestly that he wanted to go back to the trenches. And yet. . . . He began to wonder how the men of No. 12 platoon were getting on; were they getting their fair ration of rum at "stand-to"? Had the problem of draining bays 49 and 50 ever been solved? These and other questions occurred to him constantly. As his strength came back, and he added mile after mile to his daily promenade, he grew less and less

content to remain " wallowing in luxury " as he put it to the padre. The padre smiled, a wry kind of smile ; he had seen so many boys grow restless in the same way, and loved them all the more for it. At the end of another week the M.O.'s verdict was " pretty fit ; " then came a day when he received the kind permission of the authorities to " rejoin his unit for duty." In the autograph book of the titled patroness he wrote the date and four words : " Discharged—A False Alarm."

XXI

THE TURNING OF THE TIDE

[An address to a friend on learning that he was employed on munition work.]

Pass the news without delay
Right from Wipers to the sea ;
Tell the haughty R.F.A.,
Tell the haughtier R.E.,
Tell the poor old 10th Brigade,
Tell the 4th Division swells,
Let the great advance be made—
Archibald is making shells.

Tell it to the dozen spies
You may meet on any road
That we're dropping from the skies
No more " duds " that don't explode ;

9.2's we'll send the Hun,
Filled with Sheffield's fumes and smells ;
Now we'll really see some fun,
Archibald is making shells.

Kaiser Bill will wring his hands,
William Fils will drop his loot,
Hindenburg will give commands
For one quick and final scoot ;
From the crowds who work for Krupp
There will come the wildest yells,
" Ach, mein Gott ! der game is up,
Archibald is making shells."

XXII

MY NEW JOB

It is a common belief—which I myself once shared—that an adjutant does little beyond snubbing young subalterns and drawing extra pay at the rate of five shillings *per diem*. The advantages he enjoys are obvious. On the march he rides; in the trenches he spends most of his time in a snug dug-out writing nasty notes to company commanders; he is considered too valuable to send out on patrol and too busy to take charge of working parties; that cold and weary watch from 2 to 4 a.m., which comes to every platoon commander in turn, is for the adjutant only an evil memory. But, as one bright subaltern shrewdly remarked, "there must be a catch somewhere." There is. Let me tell you where.

My day's work usually begins at 3.40 a.m., when an orderly brings the morning reports he has collected from company commanders. If these messages have not all arrived at the signal offices by a quarter to four the day's strafing begins also, for by four o'clock they must be combined and summarised for despatch to the higher authorities. Apart from these routine reports, however, some keen subaltern, whose zeal may outrun his discretion, often takes advantage of the standing order to let me know at once of any " unusual occurrence." The morning before last I was roused at one o'clock to learn that a motor-horn had been heard behind the German lines—information of which the precise military value was hardly clear. With luck, however, I may be allowed to slumber fitfully till dawn. Dawn begins to lose its charm after one has seen it about a hundred times consecutively. Oftener than not recently it has been raining, but nothing disturbs the regularity of the morning " Stand to arms." After that a wash and breakfast; then,

about nine o'clock, "orderly-room" for disposal of offenders by the C.O. Fortunately for an adjutant serious crimes in the trenches are few and far between, because he must be a lawyer as well as a soldier to deal with court-martial cases.

Early in the forenoon there arrives the first salvo of official messages, which continue to drop in all day long, by telephone, telegraph, post, or special orderly. These communications may be divided roughly into three classes—(*a*) Please submit . . . ; (*b*) Please report . . . ; (*c*) Please explain . . . . Class (*a*) is usually polite, and may cover a request for the name of a clerk, a man to draw maps, or a barber to cut the General's hair. We are a versatile unit, and supplied a pigeon fancier the other day; but we failed when the demand was for a "gamekeeper or retired poacher," to look after an ambulance dog. As a rule, the second class does not waste words, but the official craving for information is insatiable. In one day I was asked to report the number

of bricklayers in the battalion, the number of men possessing two pairs of socks, and the "system for cutting men's hair, if any"! (That last message was revised half an hour later to read "Report if any system for cutting men's hair.") Class (*c*) is known in polite circles as "handing out a raspberry"—why I don't know; in the vulgar it is termed "getting a stinker," for, of course, the authorities only demand an explanation when they think we can't supply one. Therefore we humble folk find great delight in a stinker that does not come off. Recently I was asked to explain why our unit had drawn 60 smoke helmets in excess of the number laid down in Routine Order 54,628, para. 4, subsection (*b*). It gave me unholy pleasure to reply that we had drawn the correct number, viz., 111, not 171, as D.A.D.O.S. (Deputy Assistant Director of Ordnance Stores) would have seen if he had been able to read his own writing—or words to that effect. But to score off one's superiors is a dangerous pastime.

The flow of messages having ceased momentarily, I may take a stroll down the line to see the part of A Company's parapet that our morning "hate" has knocked in and arrange for its repair. B Company's fire-steps need improvement. O.C. B Company says his men are all working on the communication trench: can't be helped—fire-steps must be made better. I next meet the subaltern in charge of the grenadiers, known as the Suicide Club, and organise a practice demonstration for his gang. At this point I am overtaken by an orderly with a telegram from the brigade major demanding to know if the fifty-third item on my last inventory of trench stores is "Pumps, mechanical, one," or merely "Pumps, stovepipe, one." I satisfy his curiosity.

By the time I get back to headquarters a whole sheaf of messages has gathered. The correspondence on one subject has reached "Minute 47," and the original point at issue is in danger of being lost sight of. However, I cheerfully add "Minute 48,"

and send the packet on its journey once more. The casualty return next requires attention. Every day, as regular as the sun, this return—nil or otherwise—has to be compiled. Returns, indeed, are among the things that make an adjutant's hair grey. There are weekly returns and monthly returns ; simple returns and returns so complicated that a Chinese puzzle is child's play in comparison. Nominal rolls and field statements jostle each other on particular days of the month. Even the 29th of February finds some forms due for despatch. Pay and allowances have a whole group to themselves, for each adjutant is also the battalion's chancellor of the exchequer.

On an off day, however, I get a few minutes after lunch to smoke a pipe and read my own letters. Then the afternoon intelligence reports begin to come in. O.C. A Company is a bit of a wag, for after describing how he had been shelled, sniped, and bothered by a machine gun, he finishes up with—" Special occurrences : Nil."

During the next hour a stranger might think I ran an ironmonger's shop, for the company officers' daily indents for materials arrive—sandbags, trench boards, stakes, barbed wire, etc. Day after day wagon loads of stores are brought forward to the "dump"; night after night carrying parties bring the stores up to the firing line, which swallows everything, and still calls out for more.

Variety is sometimes added to the day's proceedings by the arrival of a "brass hat" —*i.e.*, staff officer. If he has come on legitimate business, well and good; we may even give him a cup of tea. If, however, he is somebody from "way back" looking for trouble, he generally finds it; if he happens to stumble into a sump-hole, we apologise profoundly for the state of the trench, and explain that the sump-cover must have floated away. More messages before and after dinner bring an average day within sight of an end. But, as likely as not, just when I have shaken off my gum-boots, about eleven o'clock, and

am curling up in the driest corner of my dug-out, O.C. B Company reports that three bombs have been thrown over his wire, and the Germans are sending up green flares ; do I know what they mean ? The Germans, by Jove ! I've hardly had time to think about them.

XXIII

TAKING OVER

If I kept a diary (which I don't), and if I tried, in academic fashion, to give each day its "mark," I daresay they would average out like any college examination-list—a few $\alpha\beta$'s, a few γ's, one or two inexpressible δ's, and the great majority decent, orthodox, undistinguished β's. But I should have one pure α—the day on which I took over from the French. It happened months and months ago, when our line was extending southwards, so I don't suppose the censor will object to the event being mentioned now, and even the German Intelligence Staff will have some difficulty in finding Sweet Auburn on any of their maps.

I am willing to admit that when the

C.O. packed me off that morning along with the interpreter, I did not look forward to my task with any pleasure. Taking over billets from another unit of one's own nationality is a dull, temper-destroying job, rewarded, as a rule, with more kicks than halfpence. I feared that the conduct of similar negotiations with our gallant Allies might put a strain on the Entente Cordiale. But our first experience in the new area was most auspicious and to us, unusual; British billeting parties are not accustomed to having guards turned out to present arms in their honour. At the entrance to the village we met a French officer, and I asked to be directed to his headquarters. He shook hands effusively, and insisted on showing us the way himself. We had not been able to give warning that we were coming, and mon capitaine was having breakfast. Far from betraying annoyance at our untimely intrusion, he received us with something approaching enthusiasm. He said he was charmed to make the acquaintance of an officer

"de l'admirable armée anglaise." (Generally, like most Scotsmen, I am rather touchy on the misuse of the word English for British, but this did not seem to be an opportune moment to press my point of view.) I asked the interpreter to put into decent French something to the effect that the pleasure was mine; and that when it was quite convenient, would le capitaine be kind enough to detail some junior officer to show us the billets? Le capitaine said there was no hurry, and meantime, here was fresh coffee. Would I do them the honour of sharing their frugal meal? Afterwards he would himself go round the village with me. I protested that this was quite unnecessary, but he waved my scruples aside. When his two subalterns came in there was more hand-shaking, and when we did eventually sally forth I am sure the villagers must have thought the British Commander-in-Chief had come to pay them a visit. Certainly he could not have had a better reception. Everywhere we went soldiers

stood at attention; officers of all ranks saluted and insisted on being introduced. I began to understand what it must feel like to be President of the United States, and to have to shake hands with thousands of free-born citizens.

But the business part of our mission was not being altogether neglected. Before we finished our coffee, a sous-lieutenant had begun to make a plan of the village, and now, as we went along, he jotted down the accommodation available in every barn or house. Questions about the quality of the water, or sites for horse-lines were answered almost before they were asked. About one well there was no room for doubt; on a board nailed above it some artist had drawn a skull and cross-bones. The billets themselves were fair; most of them had mud walls, and one would have been able to study astronomy at night through the roofs. We did not worry about that. The weather was good, and before the winter came we would possibly be somewhere else. But the surroundings of nearly

every billet would have shocked the most hardened sanitary inspector. How is it that so many French villagers seem to work on the plan of acquiring a dunghill, and then building a house round three sides of it? I suppose they get so used to the abomination that they cease to notice it; and I daresay it is convenient for a housewife to be able to throw slops and refuse out of every window. I trust I managed to conceal the real state of my feelings that day, but I made a mental vow that as soon as we took possession there would be an almighty scavenging.

Thanks to the kind co-operation of the sous-lieutenant, my work was completed about noon. Thereupon I made preparations to depart, doing my best to show how grateful I was for all the help that had been given me, but le capitaine would hear none of that. He said I must stay to lunch. In vain I pointed out that I had already taken up far too much of his valuable time; I had to stay. That lunch was a unique meal. The plates and mugs were

tin, the knives, forks and spoons those unwieldy instruments that fold up and join together. But for "pot-luck" the following menu will take some beating: soup, sardines, a chop and fried potatoes, carrots and sauce (served as a separate course), salad, biscuits and jam, coffee and a long cigar. We drank success to the Allies and confusion to the Boches, in champagne—out of tin mugs! We discussed the war, of course, and compared notes on our own experiences. We were equally confident about how the struggle would finish; we were equally uncertain as to when victory would come. The equipment of the British troops called forth my host's admiration, but what roused him most was the fact that units like my own, raised purely for service in Britain, had volunteered, lock, stock and barrel, to come and fight overseas. As a Territorial, I positively blushed under his eulogy.

But even the finest lunch comes to an end, and at last I tore myself away lest our C.O. should send out the military police

to search for his billeting party. Once more there was an epidemic of hand-shaking, and through all the drab days that have passed since that afternoon, I have cherished the recollection of le capitaine's courtesy, and his " Au revoir, bon camarade."

XXIV

CONCERNING M.O.'S

"APRES la guerre," whenever that may be, there is no doubt that most of us will go back to bowler hats and linen collars without great delay—or regret. But there are certain military habits we may not find it easy to give up, and one of these is our present extensive use of contractions. In this particular matter, at least, the British Army has nothing to learn from the cutest time-is-money Yankee expert. Our Commanding Officer is, of course, always referred to as the C.O. We speak of our Quartermaster as the Q.M. And our Medical Officer has grown so used to being addressed as M.O. that he hardly recognises himself under any longer description.

The position of an M.O. in a regiment is

rather peculiar; he is in it, but not of it. He continues to belong to the R.A.M.C., and is simply "attached for duty." He may depart on the shortest notice to take charge of a motor convoy, or (under some euphemistic title) to be made Divisional Examiner of latrines and washing-places. When we want to rag an M.O. in our mess, someone begins: "Once upon a time there was a clever doctor; but he joined the R.A.M.C. . . ." The story ends there, and, of course, the inference is a gross libel. But we had one M.O. who bitterly lamented divulging in an incautious moment that he was entitled to write D.P.H. (Diploma of Public Health) after his name. He now spends his days visiting ablution benches and seems doomed to remain a glorified sanitary inspector till the end of the war.

By what process an M.O. rises from the firing-line, through Field Ambulances and Clearing Stations to be Somebody at the Base remains a mystery to outsiders, and it is none of our business, anyway. But the M.O., as we know him, has more to do with

the smooth running of the battalion machinery than almost anyone. It is he who steps in between the genuine sick man and the company officer, whose unending problem is how to keep his working parties up to strength. And it is the M.O. who, with open connivance of the Adjutant, makes life uncomfortable for the scrim-shanker. In every regiment there are some men who scrim-shank (malinger) only on special occasions, but there are also a few professionals who have nothing to learn in the art. Between these and the M.O. there is constant war. The doctor scores his first point by holding his sick parade at some unearthly hour, such as 6.30 or 7 a.m. Any man obviously too ill to attend then is seen afterwards in his billet, but he must be reported at that time, when each company-orderly-corporal marches down his own little gang. As well as discouraging frivolous complaints, the early hour has another advantage: men marked M. and D. are still in time for any company working-parties or parades. Against each

man's name on the sick report the M.O. writes O.D., or L.D., or M. and D.—for he is, in his turn, as devoted to initials as the rest of us. O.D. signifies Off Duty; L.D. stands for Light Duty—such as peeling potatoes and similar necessary but hardly strenuous jobs; men given M. and D. (*i.e.*, Medicine and Duty), depart to breakfast with a strong sense of grievance and a couple of pills, swallowed in the doctor's presence. The M.O. is a man of suspicious disposition; there were times when the path outside our medical inspection room was sown with pills.

But it is the L.D.'s who give the authorities most concern. Now and then, if their number rises unduly above normal, the M.O. and the Adjutant put their heads together. One afternoon recently, all our Light-Duty men, to their serious annoyance, were ordered to parade by themselves fully equipped and armed. The really deserving cases were at once dismissed, but from those remaining the Adjutant selected a dozen whose health the M.O. certified

would be none the worse for a four-mile walk, and a little gentle exercise in the open-air. This gang was then sent off under a sensible N.C.O. to load two wagons with bricks. The same performance was repeated next afternoon ; on the third day L.D. had become rather unpopular, and the sick parade resumed its ordinary dimensions.

It is a creditable and—to those who do not know the British soldier—perhaps a surprising fact that sick parades are generally smallest on the morning before a battalion begins its turn of duty in the trenches. Indeed, the trouble when we are actually in the firing-line is that men often become seriously ill before they complain at all. But in billets, the rumour that a heavy fatigue is impending produces at once a crop of mysterious aches and coughs.

Materia Medica is a simple subject at the Front ; at least it seems so to the lay mind. The War Office supplies a neat little tin box fitted with pill-bottles of

various sizes, numbered 1 to 13. We sometimes make the wicked insinuation that the M.O. doles out the pills of which he happens to have most in stock; and we chaffed one doctor by accusing him of making experiments in combinations of various numbers with a view to writing a thesis.

Under fire, M.O.'s are nearly always singularly cool, Their scientific training and professional nonchalance combine to give them a certain enviable detachment from the emotions of other men. I remember one occasion when the German strafing was much more serious than usual, our M.O.'s orderly hastened to his dug-out. He found the doctor asleep, and in a zealous moment, wakened him. The result was calculated to discourage similar efforts in future. "But," said the orderly, "a shell might have struck you, sir." "Well, am I any safer awake?" was the retort—expressive of the truly philosophic mind. Shortly afterwards, while we were having tea in our billet, this same M.O. was handed

a message. He read it through once, then called to his bâtman. Here is the dialogue verbatim :—

" Renny ! "

" Yessir."

" Pack up my things ; I'm going to Serbia to-night."

" Yessir."

" Bring me another cup of tea."

On the work of an M.O. when a " show " is on, the present article has nothing to say. It is too serious a business to be lightly touched even by a grateful pen. Enough to say that during hard fighting every doctor does the work of about ten men, and after a spell of duty lasting perhaps twenty hours out of twenty-four, he will turn up in the firing-line during a lull, with his hat full of hard-boiled eggs, or on some other benevolent errand.

Our M.O.'s are great fellows, none the less so because they all have their own little eccentricities.

XXV

A MOVE

In one sense we are always moving; we move up to the front line, we move into reserve, we move back to rest billets with the utmost regularity. A sudden call finds us ready to start off at any time in fighting kit, leaving bag and baggage to catch up when it can. But a Move is a different matter.

The genesis of a Move is very obscure. Once upon a time a subaltern was indiscreet enough to suggest that someone at G.H.Q. pulls the names of a few regiments out of his hat, and settles their destinations by shutting his eyes and dabbing the point of his pen into a map of northern France. But the War Office fined that subaltern a million pounds or a day's pay

or something, under the Defence of the Realm Act, and we do not jest about sacred topics now.

The earliest sign that can be traced is a memo. that trickles through that mysterious route, "the usual channels," stating that the Jocks have been re-allocated to the umpty-first Division, and must be ready to move on very short notice. The phrase is significant. "One hour's notice" is definite, and usually indicates dirty work in progress somewhere; "three hours' notice" is only a precautionary measure, as a rule; but "very short notice" means anything from fifteen minutes to ten days. The immediate sequel is a memo. that "All details and employed men will rejoin you at 6 p.m. to-night." Then faces appear which, if not exactly loved long since, have certainly been lost awhile. Two members of the divisional band, greatly concerned to find that a rifle is still thought more important than a cornet or an E flat bass; a storeman from the R.E. dump; tree-

fellers from 'way back; crocks who have been with the Reserve Company for months; three policemen, lately employed by the A.P.M. to regulate motor-traffic at a busy cross-roads—a task which the exuberance of A.S.C. subalterns makes more dangerous than sentry-go in the front line. The tail of the procession is brought up by a disgusted gentleman whose tendency to flat feet got him a job as cyclist orderly at brigade head-quarters, but who is rumoured to have been acting as valet to the interpreter.

The next step depends on the consider-ateness of the staff. Our brigade-major, having been an adjutant himself not so long since, does his best to make things easy for us by sending out a Warning Order, such as, "Be ready to leave at 9 a.m. to-morrow, definite orders to follow as soon as possible." Then the transport officer has his hour of glorious life, and even the C.O. thinks twice before rubbing him the wrong way. In a neat little book issued by the War Office, and to be

purchased through any bookseller, price threepence, are "tables drawn up on the basis of a campaign in a civilised country, and in a temperate climate." If the authorities in Whitehall are satisfied that the present war comes under this definition it must be because they have not asked the opinion of any one in France. Or, perhaps they thought it a pity to disturb the schedules of Cart and Wagon Loads, so elaborate and so beautifully arranged. From Lantern, tent, folding, 1: weight 6 lbs. 10½ ozs. to Box, chiropody set, 1: weight 2 lbs. 11 ozs., there is an authorised place for everything, and everything authorised is in its place—in the book. But, for revealing deficiencies, commend me to a Move. The Q.M. goes about with a glassy eye and a notebook. As you value your life keep away from him for twenty-four hours. At one period "Lost near Ypres" was a good enough excuse for any shortage, but D.A.D.O.S. is beginning to look with suspicion on indents bearing that remark, and hints

that we had better keep to places where we have been within the last six months.

Armed with his remarkable compendium of military information, the transport officer points out, gently but firmly, that an officer's baggage is limited to 35 lbs. not 135. And though "Companion, medical, complete," may possibly cover a gramophone and a case of Perrier, neither the definition nor the wagon can be stretched to take in two basket-chairs and a wire-bed. The clothing-disinfector, the zinc baths and heater, the books from the reading-room, and the other useful but weighty articles which kind friends have sent out to us during the last few months, have reluctantly but unavoidably to be dumped. We hope, rather than expect, to see them again. One of our subalterns says that after the war he will spend half a crown or so on a motor lorry, and go quietly through France picking up dumped stores.

Mess property suddenly increases tenfold the night before a Move, for by some

unhappy coincidence the eve of our departure is always marked by the arrival of huge parcels from home or from the Field Force Canteen. Simultaneously D.A.D.O.S. presents the Q.M. with a new stock of smoke-helmets, or periscopes, or his month's supply of boots; with anything and everything, in fact, that the Ordnance does not wish to carry, and neither do we. The adjutant makes out a rough programme, and as soon as definite instructions are received, issues his orders beginning, "The Battalion will move . . ." A time is fixed for breakfast, a time for collecting officers' kits, a time for loading blankets "rolled in bundles of 20"—20 heavily underlined; in spite of which, some platoon is sure to send theirs along in a roll so big that a steam crane is almost required to hoist it on to the wagon. In theory, after the orders are issued the adjutant should have nothing more to do but smoke cigarettes until the time comes to start. But as soon as rumours of our departure get noised abroad,

the inhabitants begin to take fresh interest in us. It is suddenly discovered that windows are broken; chairs that have long been on their last legs are off them at last; a wheelbarrow has disappeared (though why any of us should want to souvenir a wheelbarrow is unexplained); one old dame alleges that "les soldats ont demoli un lit pour en faire du feu;" the bed is valued (by her) at ten francs, and "Nous, maire de M. . . . certifions que la réclamation cidessus est bien fondée." Billeting certificates have to be completed by the Q.M., our barns have to be swept out and left clean for the next tenants. A dozen other jobs seem to crop up at once, but somehow, by division of labour the work is done, and punctually at the appointed hour the Move begins. There are few greater military crimes than to be late in starting. When a whole brigade is on the march each unit is timed to pass a certain point at a given minute. To ensure uniformity someone from each

unit sets his watch to brigade time before starting. Ten minutes before every "clock hour" the entire cavalcade stops automatically for a rest; as the hour strikes the column gets on the move again, and the correct intervals are kept from head to tail. The first five miles of a march are pleasant enough, the second five are bearable, but after that every additional kilometre seems more interminable than the last. How we have learned to hate the long, straight roads of France! Those cobbled avenues of beech and poplar are the most beautiful highways in Europe, and the most execrated by footsore men. No two consecutive paces on the rough pavé are the same, and after a while each man moves mechanically, seeing nothing but the hard road or the pack of the man in front of him. He shifts his rifle from one shoulder to the other, or hitches his belt occasionally if the helve of his entrenching tool is rubbing the skin off his left leg; but for the most part he slogs on dully, with nothing in his

mind but the thought of the next halt. Napoleon's dictum that an army marches on its stomach may be accurate in one sense, but it is more than literally true that an army depends on its feet. Or, as someone else has put it, "take care of the feet, and the legs will take care of themselves." For every man who drops out owing to fatigue or exhaustion, ten get into the hands of the M.O. because of blistered heels or some similar ailment. Most of these lame ducks waddle on dourly till a halt comes; it is the first 300 yards after a rest that knocks them up.

By the time men reach their billets, they are in no mood to be critical, and it is perhaps just as well. When a big Move is in progress, billeting parties can be sent only a few hours in advance, and even then a worried staff captain probably does no more than point out one or two streets, and say with a wave of his hand, "That's your area." Sometimes we may not get as much as a barn,

and the regiment finds itself "billeted" in a wood, or perhaps a bare field. But until you have seen them go into billets or bivouacs after a long march, you cannot realise how quickly, or in what uncomfortable attitudes men can fall soundly asleep. A fresh trek may be in prospect for next day; at that moment the Q.M. may be strafing the A.S.C. over a question of rations, or the adjutant busy calculating the distance to E.22.c. on those ingeniously squared maps. But for "other ranks" the morrow has no terrors. Sufficient unto the day is the Move thereof.

XXVI

BACK FROM LEAVE

We're back again to trenches and to Huns,
To snipers, mortars, mines and hand grenades,
To working half the night with picks and spades;
From dawn to dusk they bang those beastly guns;
We're back again.

We're back again where everything is wet,
Where dug-outs drip and mud is ankle-deep,
Where "stand to arms" disturbs our beauty-sleep,
Where "Little Willies" come, lest we forget
We're back again.

We're back to where we shave, say, once
a week,
And as for baths—such luxuries are past
(Some could not tell you when they had
their last),
To army biscuits,—bread is far to seek,—
We're back again.

We're back from where the croakers drove
us mad,
With all their squabbling, molly-grunting
din ;
We mix once more with men who *know*
we'll win—
Therefore to tell the truth, we're rather
glad
We're back again.

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